

**PREPARATORY WORK FOR NURSES \*****THE CENTRAL SCHOOL IDEA**

BY MARY E. P. DAVIS

Superintendent of Nurses Boston Hospital for the Insane

IN the first issue of *THE AMERICAN JOURNAL OF NURSING*, October, 1900, the editor mentioned the fact that a movement was on foot in Boston to establish a preparatory course for those intending to take up nursing as a profession.

In view of the long-continued absence of data regarding it, the movement, if it made any impression at all, must have seemed simply a ripple made by the premature plunge of a restless spirit just then in need of an outlet for an unaccustomed plethora of time, or by one who, not "sitting down and counting the cost," has been since overwhelmed by the magnitude of the plunge, both in its physical and financial aspect, or, seeing that such a movement was widespread and the establishment of the preliminary course in some hospitals an entity, is content to allow that the ideal course is with us, and that nothing remains to be done except to urge each school to establish a course for itself.

While admitting that there may seem grains of truth in the first group of ideas, the last I am not at all content to allow; and as I have been given the credit of this movement, I am pleased with this opportunity to make known my ideas of a preparatory course, with a few of the reasons for them, and the difficulties that stand in the way of its accomplishment.

To begin at the beginning, it may interest you to know the point where the desultory, vague impression began to assume proper proportions and take definite shape that lack of proper early educational advantages in the science of domestic life was too serious a handicap to be altogether offset by the natural or scholastic abilities of the probationer, or to be more than partially atoned for by the routine methods, without technical instruction, which obtain in the training-schools.

Some ten or twelve years ago, in the early part of my career as a nominal superintendent of nurses, I was asked by one of the "managers," who in visiting the wards of the hospital was struck by the not very prepossessing appearance of a probationer, if we were going to accept her, and receiving an affirmative reply, launched at me a series of questions which in substance amounted to this, Upon what basis do you make your selection?

\* Papers read at the ninth annual meeting of the American Society of Superintendents of Training-Schools for Nurses, held at Detroit, Mich., September 9-11, 1902.

Up to that time I had not given the acceptance or rejection problem systematic thought enough to be ready with any more intelligent answer than an enumeration of the requirements set forth in the circular supplied to applicants, which are approximately the same in all schools.

While giving the answer I became suddenly conscious that I was making a rather lame, if not misleading, statement, and I hastened to throw in "personality," "temperament," "aptitude," and a few more qualifications that came at random to my mind, being all the time aware that in this particular instance the weight of the evidence was against me, and that it was superior educational advantages, both in academic and household branches, that made her acceptance possible.

A careful after-study of the situation led me to the conviction that while it was true that without the qualifications *à la* circular she could not be accepted as a probationer, it was equally true that the possession of them was not sufficient to insure her acceptance as a pupil unless accompanied by higher intellectual attainments than the circular called for, combined with the domestic sciences, of which manual dexterity is the exponent.

From observation and experience of the failures or successes of the majority of probationers I arrived at the above conclusion, coexistent with another, which was that in assuming the burden of this higher education we were unwisely making ourselves responsible for all the defects and deficiencies in the training of nurses, and bearing the criticisms against the profession, aimed for the most part not against their nursing education, but the concomitants.

You can see at once that, following up such a train of thought, a preparatory course for an entrance standard was inevitable, which resolved itself into the organization of a technical school entirely free from domination of hospital or training-school, planned and conducted by mutual arrangement between the two schools, where anyone possessing certain qualifications and paying a nominal fee might take the course.

Under such a plan, at the end of the school term a certificate would be given to the successful pupil, which would be honored by the training-school only so far as to accept the holder as a probationer.

It binds the training-school to nothing more than a trial, and will in no way conflict with or supersede the existing regulations.

The time-honored custom of probation will continue, robbed of the greater part of its terrors and objectionableness. The tests of physical capability and mutual balance will still be made by the school authorities and gauged by the standards of the profession. If the probationer

fails to grasp the situation or master the nice points in the handicraft which cannot be taught by precept or acquired by imitation, or if the attitude is at variance with the ethics of the profession, she will be rejected, then as now, but with far more certainty of finality.

This entrance standard, I know, is calculated to "take away the breath" of the superintendents, especially of the large schools, as the question at once arises, How will we ever secure the full complement of probationers necessary to make up our classes and do the work?

Well, if it comes to that, don't have them do the work, have them do the nursing, and make them responsible for the character of the work done under their supervision. But that we have small grounds to hope for so agreeable an innovation we have only to "hark back" to the early days of training-schools to hear the echo of the same cry, when the difference between the requirements for entrance to a training-school and the qualifications of the rather intelligent but illiterate hospital nurse was far more pronounced, to have our fears set at rest on that score.

While recognizing the merits of the preliminary course in hospitals, in support of my ideas of an entrance standard I am obliged to oppose it:

First, because few hospitals in their physical construction are capable of accommodating one-third their nursing staff on a purely academic basis, or financially able to furnish tuition, board, and laundry where "future expectations" is the only indemnity.

At varying periods a number of these people will be found unsuitable for the profession, though abundantly able to acquire the technique, and they go out by so much the debtors of the hospital, diverting its funds from legitimate channels, giving color to the otherwise unjust criticism that nurses' education is purely charitable and consequently defective.

Second, in establishing courses in the few which have adequate facilities we are discriminating against the majority and bidding fair to defeat our own aims.

What are our aims?

Ours has been most emphatically the improvement and advancement of the "body professional."

If the preliminary course cannot be successfully introduced into all the training-schools, we might as well abandon our plans for a uniform curriculum, from the adoption of which we anticipated so much that would be of advantage to the nursing world.

Another is State registration. What ghost of a chance will the graduate from the indigent training-school have when she comes up

before the State Board for examination, when we are so fortunate as to obtain legislation?

I say nothing of the already overworked superintendent of nurses, who must plan and direct, or is at least responsible for all this additional theoretical education, since it is a part of the curriculum, who simply shifts the burden from one shoulder to the other, and goes more serenely on, sacrificing herself and resignedly breaking down at a much earlier stage of her career. The pity of it is its needlessness.

The hospital is the place par excellence to teach the art of nursing and to practise the science, but it is not the best place, or even a good place, to teach the concomitants.

If we are convinced of this, where is, then, the best place?

Ah! there's the rub.

There are a number of technical institutes throughout the land and schools galore where all and special branches are taught. We might think at first glance they were just the places we were in search of, but we have learned that they do not fill the long-felt want.

I have not looked into the matter very closely, but so far I have not been able to discover that any of them have in any appreciable degree arranged a course looking exclusively to this end, and I have yet to meet with the applicant who in preparation for this work has taken such a course.

Realizing that the methods in these schools are pedagogic, or towards school honors rather than utility, and that the time consumed and the money expended are items of consideration to the expectant probationer, also that from ignorance of her special needs she would be unable to select the desired subjects and plan a course for herself, much less be able or allowed to dictate the method of procedure, even if she knew what she wanted, it becomes imperative that special schools for this preparatory work be established in or near all the great training-school centres, and that all who are criticising the product of the present methods, and their name is legion, or clamoring for better educated nurses, or a better system of nursing education, embrace the opportunity thus presented to put their shoulders to the wheel and do their part towards bringing about the desired result. This is purely an educational scheme, and no one need feel the least hesitation in calling upon the public, who will be largely the recipient of its own benefactions, or philanthropists, whose aims are "the greatest good to the greatest number," or owners of superfluous wealth seeking worthy objects on which to expend it, to give it financial backing.

Money is all that is necessary to place such a school on the broadest basis. A well-paid corps of teachers and demonstrators will insure good

results, and while every subject purely medical or nursing will be excluded from the curriculum, "everything that a nurse should know," exclusive of those subjects, will be planned and arranged for by an efficient committee and the school supervised by one eminently fitted by long and intimate acquaintance with the methods, limitations, and defects of the present system, the needs, demands, and aims of the future, to make it of the utmost utility.

Herein is the strongest argument in favor of the preliminary course in the hospital—that the whole scheme from beginning to end is under the direction of competent judges of the requisites.

I will give one case in point showing the difficulty of arranging a course in any technical school not wholly given up to that one purpose.

In the *JOURNAL* you must have seen the notice that the superintendents of nurses in Boston met at the Thorndike to discuss "nursing questions," and although that was not their only meeting to discuss those same questions, the moving cause of this particular one was an article which appeared in the *Transcript* entitled "A Unique Institution for Women's Technical Education."

It was a glowing announcement, and offered opportunities for technical preparation in every walk of life in which women are engaged as bread-winners. Among others, and most important to the superintendents, was the announcement that a preparatory course for nurses would be established. We hailed it with delight for the promise it gave. A committee was formed to confer with the officers and an audience was granted by the dean, who kindly devoted some time to the discussion, frankly acknowledged that no plans had been formed, because no one knew exactly what was wanted, courteously listened while we explained our position, now and then made a suggestion, frequently asked a leading question, was readily convinced that in this instance it was not one, but many branches that had to be condensed, weeded out, or dovetailed together to make a symmetrical whole, but the suggestion that nurses have a voice in this arrangement met with negative and most non-committal encouragement. While apparently recognizing the justice and common-sense of the request, we were made aware that we had reached the limit of the dean's authority, and were informed that the matter would be laid before the trustees.

To sum up the points of importance in my plan for a central school:

The school is to be preparatory for the purpose of acquiring theoretical knowledge of the practical work required, so that the work from the beginning of the probation shall be intelligently, not mechanically, performed.

It is to be established outside hospital or training-school jurisdiction for its broad general effect. It is to be central, bounded at first by natural or geographical divisions, later by the need and ability to establish greater numbers, but never exclusive.

The plan, based on the relation of the preparatory school to the training-school.

The term, one school year.

The curriculum, arranged by a committee of experts, composed equally of nurses and teachers.

Entrance qualifications fixed by the same committee.

A fee, nominal or otherwise, according to the financial status of the school, but always a fee.

The certificate, a blank form filled out by the proper authorities constituting a standard for entrance to a training-school.

The principal of the school to be an ex-superintendent of nurses chosen by the superintendents of training-schools of the territory within which the preparatory school is situated. The choice to be ratified by the trustees.

While the whole scheme as presented is merely a rough outline, it is perhaps enough to show that the undertaking, if not overwhelming, is neither small nor simple.

We are agreed the world over that an innovation is a necessity—something must be done to improve the present training-school system, and we are unanimous also that the “something” is a preparation for the work before undertaking it, the only real difference of opinion being, who shall be responsible for this primary education?

I hope that I have made it clear that while I do not underestimate any of the difficulties, the plan is feasible if the one serious obstacle, the monetary situation, can be overcome.

---

## **PREPARATORY WORK AT THE NEW YORK CITY TRAINING-SCHOOL**

**By MARY S. GILMOUR**

*Superintendent of Nurses New York City Training-School*

For some time past, about two years, it has been very apparent that a preliminary course was necessary for the pupils of the New York City Training-School.

This conclusion was arrived at before any communication was held with other schools which had established a preparatory course. In fact, the officers, three in number, were so busy attempting to do all the